

Planning Committee

08 October 2021

Agenda item number 9

National Design Guide and National Model Design Code

Report by Head of Planning

Summary

The National Planning Policy Framework states that all Local Planning Authorities should prepare local Design Guides or Codes and this report sets out the Broads Authority's intentions around this.

Recommendation

To note the report.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. On 20 July 2021 the Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is the document setting out the national approach and principles for planning, and it provides the framework within which a Local Planning Authority (LPA) must prepare its Local Plan.
- 1.2. The revised NPPF did not make major changes to the predecessor NPPF, but there were some changes of emphasis as well as a revised housing test and an increased focus on design. The revised chapter on design (Chapter 12 'Achieving Well Designed Places') is attached at Appendix 1 in a tracked-change version so Members can see the differences between the 2019 and 2021 versions of the NPPF.

- 1.3. One of the main changes is the requirement set out in paragraphs 128 and 129 for LPAs to prepare design guides or codes for their area, with further guidance on this given in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. This report sets out how the LPA proposes to do this.

2. The National Design Guide

- 2.1. The [National Design Guide](#) is a comprehensive document that sets out the rationale and role of good design. It identifies and illustrates the Government's priorities for well-designed places in the form of ten characteristics. These ten characteristics are:
 - i. Context (enhance the surroundings)
 - ii. Identify (attractive and distinctive)
 - iii. Built form (a coherent pattern of development)
 - iv. Movement (accessible and easy to move around)
 - v. Nature (enhanced and optimised)
 - vi. Public spaces (safe, social and inclusive)
 - vii. Uses (mixed and integrated)
 - viii. Homes and buildings (functional, healthy and sustainable)
 - ix. Resources (efficient and resilient)
 - x. Lifespan (made to last)
- 2.2. Further details and information is then provided about each of the characteristics, as well as examples of good practice and illustrations.
- 2.3. The National Design Guide is effectively an urban design manual and sets out the principles and practice of creating well designed, responsive environment. It is not limited to new buildings, but covers the entire public realm. Unsurprisingly, the document focuses mainly on urban environments and is likely to be most useful on larger sites or for urban infill schemes, however whilst there is little reference to the rural environment (built and otherwise), the characteristics and design principles apply nonetheless. Some of the ten characteristics will be more relevant in a rural area than others.
- 2.4. The principles contained within the document are well established, but this is the first time they have been set out formally in this way as an indication of the Government's expectations and this is welcome as it strengthens the ability of an LPA to apply design standards as a criterion in decision making.

3. The National Model Design Code

- 3.1. The [National Model Design Code](#) is published to complement the National Design Guide. It provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies, identifying the three stages of production of a design code (Analysis, Vision, Code), and is effectively a toolkit for LPAs to use when producing their own documents.

- 3.2. It also explains that the geographic coverage, level of detail and degree of prescription in a design code or guide should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place. There is also guidance on the involvement of the local community in the process.

4. Preparing a Design Guide for the Broads

- 4.1. The NPPF states at paragraph 128 that “all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences”. It goes on to explain in paragraph 129 that “Design guides and codes can be prepared at an area-wide, neighbourhood or site specific scale, and to carry weight in decision-making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents”.
- 4.2. It is proposed that the design guide and code work for the Broads is developed in parallel with the Local Plan review, as there are similarities in the processes and the consultation and engagement work can be shared. It is proposed that the consultation on the Local Plan ‘Issues and Options’ will take place in summer 2022 and this timescale is appropriate for the preparation of the preliminary work on the design guide and code.
- 4.3. Members will recall that the Government’s 2020 Planning [White Paper](#) proposed the classification of all land into one of three different types of area, which were identified as ‘growth’, ‘renewal’ or ‘protection’. Whilst there is currently uncertainty around how these plans will be taken forward by Government, the nature of the Broads (both in terms of its protected status and the constraints) means the emphasis in any design guide or code for the Broads area is likely to be on the protection and reinforcement of its existing qualities and characteristics, rather than on the design of new development. It is therefore intended that the preliminary work will focus on documenting the key design characteristics of the Broads, and then developing these in relation to the ten characteristics set out in the National Design Guide.
- 4.4. It is useful to note that there are already a number of documents which cover design in the Broads. These include the [Planning for Waterside Bungalows/Chalets Guide](#) which provides design guidance for a specific form of building, the [Sustainability Guide](#) (which was prepared in 2011, and specific analysis of particular areas in the various Conservation Area Appraisals. In addition, the adopted Local Plan includes commentary and advice around a number of the themes identified in the ten characteristics, including, for example, the natural environment section with the [Biodiversity Enhancements Guide](#), and the landscape section with the [Landscaping Strategy Guide](#). Much of this work can be used to develop and inform the design guide and code.
- 4.5. There may be opportunities to work with other LPAs on design guides which cover larger or shared areas. The Suffolk LPAs are working together on developing a Suffolk-wide Design Charter and the Broads Authority has had some involvement in this.

5. Financial implication

- 5.1. There will be financial implications associated with the production of a Broads Design Guide or Code, but in the first instance the requirement will be mainly for officer time. There will be a need for additional resources to develop the document, including the costs of material for consultation and final publication, and this will need to be budgeted for in 2021/22.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The preparation of a Design Guide and Code for the Broads will provide guidance for communities and developers around acceptable forms of development and will enable the LPA to ensure the protection of the Broads whilst allowing new development which contributes to the quality of the area.

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Background papers: National Design Guide and National Model Design Code

12. Achieving well-designed places

~~424.~~126. The creation of high quality, [beautiful and sustainable](#) buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

~~425.~~127. Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood ~~plans~~[planning groups](#) can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, [both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers](#).

128. To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, ~~plans or supplementary~~[all local](#) planning ~~documents~~[authorities](#) should ~~use visual tools such as~~ [prepare](#) design guides ~~and/or~~ codes. ~~These~~ [consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences](#). Design guides and ~~codes~~ [provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design](#). ~~However their~~[Their geographic coverage](#), level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances [and scale of change](#) in each place, and should allow a suitable degree of variety ~~where this would~~.

~~426.~~129. [Design guides and codes can be justified](#)~~prepared~~ at an area-wide, [neighbourhood or site- specific scale, and to carry weight in decision-making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents](#). [Landowners and developers may contribute to these exercises, but may also choose to prepare design codes in support of a planning application for sites they wish to develop. Whoever prepares them, all guides and codes should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area, taking into account the guidance contained in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. These national documents should be used to guide decisions on applications in the absence of locally produced design guides or design codes](#).

~~427.~~130. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

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- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future ~~users~~⁴⁶; ~~users~~⁴⁹; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

~~131.~~ Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined⁵⁰, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.

~~428.~~132. Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

~~429.~~133. Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life⁴⁷. a Healthy Life⁵¹. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, ~~local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.~~

⁴⁹ Planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing, where this would address an identified need for such properties. Policies may also make use of the nationally described space standard, where the need for an internal space standard can be justified.

Permission⁵⁰ Unless, in specific cases, there are clear, justifiable and compelling reasons why this would be inappropriate.

⁵¹ Birkbeck D and Kruczkowski S et al (2020) *Building for a Healthy Life*

planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.

~~134.~~ Development that is not well designed should be refused ~~for development of poor design that, especially where it fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, reflect local design policies and government guidance on design⁵², taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or guidance and supplementary planning documents, such as design guides and codes.~~ Conversely, ~~where the design of a significant weight should be given to:~~

a) development ~~accords~~ which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. ~~overall form and layout of their surroundings.~~

~~430.~~ 135. Local planning authorities should ~~also~~ seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

~~130.~~ In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

~~434.~~ 136. The quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. A separate consent process within the planning system controls the display of advertisements, which should be operated in a way which is simple, efficient and effective. Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts.

⁵² [Contained in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.](#)

~~Planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing, where this would address an identified need for such properties. Policies may also make use of the nationally described space standard, where the need for an internal space standard can be justified.~~

⁴⁷ [Birkbeck D and Kruczkowski S \(2015\) *Building for Life 12: The sign of a good place to live.*](#)